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**The Hindrances to Ministerial Success.**

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AN

# ADDRESS,

DELIVERED AT THE COMMENCEMENT,

IN

**The General Theological Seminary**

OF THE

**PROTESTANT EPISCOPAL CHURCH**

IN THE UNITED STATES.

HELD IN ST. PETER'S CHURCH, NEW-YORK, ON FRIDAY,  
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THE author of the following remarks thinks it but justice to himself to say, that only a few hours were allowed him in their preparation. Owing to circumstances which need not be mentioned, he has not re-written them ; but gives them as they were delivered, with only a few verbal alterations.

## ADDRESS.

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MY DEAR FRIENDS,

It has been made my duty to offer you a few remarks, prior to the severance of the tie which has connected you with the institution whose interests are so dear to us all. I would gladly have given this task into other hands, as circumstances have prevented me from so arranging them as to do justice to myself, and prove most profitable to you. I have only been able to make use of the intervals allowed me from the continued duties connected with my visit to this city. But my remarks are offered to you, such as they are, and with this consolation, that they have in view your best interests, and the promotion of the glory of God. I know that those of you who are about to leave the institution with which you have been connected, look upon this period of your lives as full of deep interest, and as connected with fearful responsibilities. It is truly so. I know of no situation in which any one can be placed, that is so exciting, and so full of anxious solicitude, as the one you now occupy. You are soon to receive a commission to enter upon a work which calls for qualifications that are calculated to make the most highly gifted, as to mental attainments, and the most deeply imbued with the spirit of our adorable Redeemer, feel their entire unfitness, and their inability to meet their demands. If there were not high and holy motives prompting to the performance of the duties which this work demands, and an entire reliance upon the promise of assistance from God himself, we would at once tell you, that it would be in vain for you to accept this commission ;—its duties you could never perform—



its responsibilities you could never meet. I therefore take it for granted, that your hopes of success rest upon the reception of that assistance which is so freely promised ; which can make the weak strong, the timid bold, the wavering decided, and the humblest instrument, the means of accomplishing the will of God. That you desire most ardently to be successful in winning souls to Christ, we believe ; that you are anxiously waiting for the command to go forward, we also believe. But that you may be disappointed, and have cause for sorrow, that so few have been brought to Christ through your means, is, to say the least, possible. For it is a lamentable fact, that few, very few, of those who have been commissioned as ambassadors of Christ, have been successful in bringing sinners to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Jesus. Take up the records of the different churches that are yearly presented, and how small the number reported as having come out from the world and become the followers of our blessed Lord. Now, the fault must rest somewhere. We cannot, we dare not, charge God with withholding his aid—that is freely proffered. We cannot call in question the fitness of the means which he has prescribed—this would be to doubt his wisdom, and impeach his professed solicitude for the happiness of the creatures of his hands. The truth cannot be disguised : we must admit, that it is want of faithfulness in those who have professed “to be inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost” to undertake this work, and who have solemnly sworn to be faithful unto death. I trust, therefore, it will not be out of place to present before you some of those causes which have prevented the gospel of Christ from having its due influence upon the hearts and lives of men.

The first I would notice, is the want of faithfulness in presenting before men their true condition as lost, ruined, miserable, wretched sinners. The picture which the word of God exhibits is by no means flattering to human nature. It represents them as “dead in trespasses and sins,” as “working out all uncleanness with greediness ;” and the homilies of the church but echo this language, “that they are altogether spotted and defiled,”

“that there is not a spark of goodness in them.” We also find that the liturgy is in accordance with it: “that there is no health in them ;” and addresses all, without any distinction, as “miserable sinners.” Now, we believe, that many fail of success by not holding up before men, without any fear, this their condition. They are often told, that there is some goodness in them, which needs but to be cultivated, in order to fit them for the reception of the favour of God ; that they are only to be diligent in the use of the means which the word of God prescribes, and they can look with confidence to the rich promise of his love. Hence it is, that you hear sinners addressed as if they were Christians, because, forsooth, they have been baptized, and are found sitting with the people of God ; when every malignant passion is rampant within, and their hearts untouched by the renewing and sanctifying influences of the Spirit of God. Thus a degree of self-complacency is produced, and the sinner, instead of going to the cross of Jesus as a broken-hearted penitent, contents himself with a general belief in the atonement which he has made, and relies upon his outward reformation, and reception of the sacrament, for acceptance with God, rather than upon the merits of a crucified Redeemer. The great effort of the ministers of Christ should be to convince of sin ; to place before men their true condition in the sight of God. This, we are told, is the first office of the Spirit of God ; and unless they follow his method, and bring all their energies to bear upon this great and important point, they will inevitably fail of success. Many have failed, and are now doing nothing, comparatively speaking, “in bringing sinners from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God.” It is thought and believed, that there is one gospel for the learned, and another for the unlearned ; one for the rich and the great ones of this earth, and another for the poor and the unfortunate. The time is come when men will not bear the gospel of Christ, and are saying, “prophesy unto us smooth things ;” and, unfortunately, the minister of Christ, catching the spirit of the age, oftentimes keeps back the truth, which has been, and ever will be, offensive



to men. A proper reserve is now to be practised, and men are not to receive those truths which made a Felix tremble, and a cruel jailer exclaim, "what must I do to be saved?" The language of Scripture is too harsh for delicate ears; it must be softened and rendered less offensive; and the consequence has been, that instead of hearing of large accessions to the fold of Christ, and the Church becoming the joy of the whole earth for the purity of her members, and the comfort which she dispenses to her children, she has nearly passed into the hands of the world; and the day, we fear, is rapidly coming for the chastisement of the Lord, to bring her back to her allegiance to her Great Head. To prove that this is not an extravagant picture, I have only to direct your attention to the situation of the ministry in our church at the present moment. How few of us are enduring the contradiction of sinners; how few of us are opposed because we have declared unto men their true condition: that they are obnoxious to the wrath of God, rebels against his government, and despisers of the riches of his grace, and are rapidly preparing for the anguish of the second death. We would suffer, we must suffer, if we do our duty. We are not to make difficulties, or court opposition, we are to preach the truth in love; but if we do preach the truth, if we tear from men the veil which conceals their deformity, and open up to them the deep depravity of their nature, we cannot expect to escape their hatred, or be free from their reproach. For I can see nothing which makes the situation of the ministers of Christ now in any way different from what it was in the early days of the Church. It was then a situation filled with trials, and despised of men. To be a minister of Christ then, was to be held up as the object of derision and scorn. Yea, such were their trials, as to induce St. Paul to declare, "that he thought that God had set forth the Apostles last, as it were appointed unto death, for they were made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels and to men. Even unto this present hour," he says, "we both hunger and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place, and labour, working with our own hands;

being reviled, we bless ; being persecuted, we suffer it ; being defamed, we intreat ; we are made as the filth of the earth, and are the off-scouring of all things unto this day." Now, the very same truths are to be proclaimed by the ministers of Christ at the present day, as were made known by the Apostles, and which brought down upon them the odium and reproach of men. They did not dare to soften the truth, or so shape its requirements as to meet the circumstances of their hearers, as not to give offence, and thus keep down the arm of persecution ; on the contrary, they seized every occasion, even when bonds and imprisonment awaited them, to make known unto men their lost and ruined condition, and that there was no way of escape from the wrath of God, but by and through Him whom they had cruelly put to death. St. Paul stands before us as a monument of faithfulness and perseverance, and of high and noble courage in making known the truth, under all circumstances. He feared not to tell a guilty Governor, who had his life in his hands, that he was a wretched sinner in the sight of God ; that he had trampled upon the rights of his fellow-creatures, as well as violated the laws of the moral Governor of the universe. And such, my friends, must be the spirit of every ambassador of Christ now. He must not fear the face of man. He must not keep back the truth, even if his life be the forfeit. The truth is more demanded now than it was in the days of the Apostles. Men are more daring in their opposition to God ; vice is on the increase ; and millions are continually going down to an eternal death.

We hear much about returning to primitive practices at the present day, but we fear it is only in reference to those things which may give a greater eclat to our ecclesiastical organization, and render us more conspicuous among men. We want to see a return to primitive fearlessness, and primitive faithfulness in making known the condition of a guilty world. We want to see a return to that self-denial, that persevering energy, that contempt of the applause of men, that unshaken confidence in the promises of God, which characterized the first preachers



of the gospel of our blessed Lord. If you desire to be successful, you must imitate their example ; you must catch the spirit which fired them to the performance of duties, which now appear almost beyond the power of man to perform, but which must, which can, which ought to be performed by every minister of Christ, because that very assistance is vouchsafed now, which was given to them, and which enabled them to lay down their lives for the sake of Him who had redeemed them with his own precious blood. Be faithful, then, I beseech you, in this part of your duty. Be not afraid to tell men their true condition in the sight of God. If you are called to preach before kings, or governors, or the most favoured of this world's votaries, tell them what God has declared in reference to their condition. Bring all your efforts to bear upon this first, this great point, to convince men of sin. On your success in this particular depends your whole success in bringing sinners to Christ.

Another cause of failure is the want of a clear exhibition of the leading doctrine of the gospel, viz. justification by faith. Of course I cannot on the present occasion present before you a full view of this great subject. That there are conflicting opinions in reference to it, all must acknowledge, who are in the least degree conversant with the passing events of the day. There are, however, no conflicting statements in the word of God. And I think there would be but little difference of opinion on this subject, if we could divest ourselves of all predilections for favourite systems, and the opinions of men, and rely simply on the word of God. The whole doctrine is contained in the answer of St. Paul to the jailer at Phillippi, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved." This is sufficient to give us a clear view of the subject. It at once tells us, that it is not by any righteousness that we have, or can have, that we are to be justified before God, but that it is by the righteousness of another, even Jesus Christ, to which we must look for acceptance with God ; that it is a simple act on the part of God, by which he declares, that we are freely, fully, perfectly acquitted of all



charge against us, on account of the merits of his dear Son; those merits having been made ours by an act of faith; this act having no merit, but as freely and fully the gift of God, as the pardon and benefits received. Here there is no difficulty. The awakened sinner at once perceives that this is what he desires. He feels that there is nothing in him which can merit the forgiveness of God, that he must have some one who has merit enough, and dignity enough, to stand between him and an offended God. To Christ, therefore, he looks, as he is commanded, with an eye of faith, and at once his burden is removed, and he experiences that peace which the world cannot give, and which passeth all understanding. But how often is the philosophy of man mixed up with this subject? To such an extent, that the poor sinner who has been roused to the consideration of his soul's salvation by the Spirit of God accompanying the preached word, can now scarcely find out how he can be saved. He is often told to reform, cut off all evil habits, engage in the most scrupulous and faithful performance of duties, and having done all these things, then to trust to the mercy of God through Jesus Christ. But how contrary is this plan to that which God has made known for his salvation; and how contrary to that which the Church, echoing the word of God, has made known to those who are found looking to her for direction. She tells us in her 13th article, "that all works done before the grace of Christ, and the inspiration of his spirit, are not pleasant to God, for as much as they spring not of faith in Jesus Christ." And again, in her 11th article, "we are accounted righteous before God, only for the merit of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, by faith, and not for our own works or deservings." But it appears that the great desire is to escape from these formularies of our faith, or so interpret them as to suit the ever changing opinions of men. The plan of the gospel which they set forth, is too simple, and brings too little glory to men; they do not fall in with the pride of the human heart, and effectually cut off all ground for boasting before God. Hence they must be modified to suit the restless and innovating spirit of the age, and the

Church must now be torn loose from these strong holds, to be drifted with every current, and driven and tossed with every breeze. But what is the result? Men have succeeded in some degree in mystifying this great doctrine, and how few are led to the cross of Jesus Christ! It is indeed a melancholy scene that is presented when we look over the Church of God. Take up our congregations one by one, and count the number of even the professed followers of Christ, and what a fearfully small proportion do they bear to the number of those who are "lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God." This I consider to be the result of the philosophizing spirit of the day, which has almost concealed this great doctrine of the gospel, and bound sinners fast who were almost ready to break away from the bondage of sin. For, my friends, there is nothing that will excite a just and well founded hope in the bosom of the sinner, awakened to a sense of his sinfulness, but pointing him at once to the Lamb of God that taketh away the sins of the world. It is in the cross alone that he can see the guilt, as well as be assured of the pardon of sin,—and if this be not presented as a relief against the accusations of conscience, and the denunciations of a violated law, to be received at once and not by degrees, he feels that his case is not met, that the remedy is not suited to the disease. If you wish then to be successful ministers of Christ, hold up this doctrine before men in all its simplicity, and as their only hope; tell them that this righteousness can be theirs by a simple act of faith, which God has promised to bestow, and that having this, the inheritance which is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, is theirs, and that for ever; direct them to adopt the language of the Church, as containing the ground of all their hopes of acceptance with God: "by the mystery of thy holy Incarnation; by thy holy Nativity and Circumcision; by thy Baptism, Fasting and Temptation; by thine Agony and Bloody Sweat; by thy Cross and Passion; by thy precious Death and Burial; by thy glorious Resurrection and Ascension; and by the coming of the Holy Ghost, Good Lord, deliver us." Here the sinner has something on which to



rest his hopes ; he can plead the obedience of Christ even unto death as the ground of his pardon and justification before God ; and having this, he has new motives to quicken him in the pursuit of things eternal, and the high security of the promise of God that his labour shall not be in vain ; he now performs good works, not that he *may* be accepted of God, but because he *is* accepted ; and so long as this idea is cherished, as based upon his union with Christ, he has before him the highest motives to prompt him to renewed faithfulness, to untiring exertion in making his calling and election sure. He feels “that these works cannot put away his sins, and endure the severity of God’s judgment, but being the fruits of faith, and following after his justification, they are pleasing and acceptable to God in Christ.” (See article 12th.)

This is the doctrine which our beloved Church tells us to teach, and this is the great leading doctrine which she brought out from the corruptions of Papacy, and which she now holds up as the brightest gem of the reformation.

Another cause of the want of ministerial success is to be found in the prevailing disposition to hold up to an unwarrantable degree the externals of the Church. That these are to be exhibited at proper times and on proper occasions, none can doubt. The distinctive principles of the Church ought to be fearlessly and faithfully presented. And in doing this, they ought to be placed where the Saviour has placed them, without the least compromise. There is nothing to be gained, even if it could be done in consistence with our duty to the Church, by a timid and time-serving policy in regard to these things. In addition to this, those who differ from us will respect us far more by being candid and honest, than by attempting to conciliate by a sacrifice of principle. We ought to take high ground on this subject, and preach the truth in love. But this is only a small part of the duty of the minister of Christ. If he confine his attention to what are called the externals of the Church, he may make enlightened Churchmen, but he will make few Christians. Men may be able to explain a rubric, and expound the canons,

and tell all the festivals and fasts, and be able to trace the apostolic succession, and still be "in the gall of bitterness, and in the bonds of iniquity." Now, we believe that there has been too much time given to these things, to the neglect of those which can alone make wise unto salvation. We have succeeded in extending the knowledge of the Church and her peculiarities, from the highest to the lowest among us, and I thank God for it; but have we succeeded in any fair proportion in bringing sinners to the knowledge of the truth as it is in Christ? We must acknowledge we have not. Besides all this, hundreds have been driven from our communion to seek for spiritual nourishment in other folds, because they could only learn the principles of the Church—I mean as it regards her external organization—instead of receiving the first lesson how they were to be saved; and others, also, who had been led to Christ, but were not built up in their most holy faith. The gospel being received, it is an easy matter to throw around them those safeguards which the Church has provided; and if it had been done as it should have been done, we should not now be called to lament that the Church has almost sunk to ruin in places where once hundreds thronged her gates with thanksgivings, and entered into her courts with praise. I desire, then, to caution you in reference to this subject, for I well know the desire which we all feel to extend the borders of our beloved Church, and none feel more than those who have just commenced to tell of her excellencies, and make known through her the riches of redeeming love. Your first aim should be to save the soul; to bring all the motives which the Gospel furnishes to bear upon this point. This should be the all-absorbing desire of your heart; and in doing this, it is an easy thing so to exhibit the Church and her peculiarities, that they may tend to strengthen your efforts and secure the desired result, rather than turn away the sinner inquiring the way to be saved. I feel confident that a neglect of this has thrown coldness and formality over many churches in the land; and more than all, has, I fear, destroyed many souls.



The last point I would very briefly notice as preventing ministerial success, is the want of a due appreciation of ministerial responsibilities. I will not enter upon the nature of this office, and the duties and responsibilities which it involves. That the latter are not duly appreciated is, unfortunately, oftentimes too true. There are many who solemnly assume this office, and declare that they will be instant in season and out of season in discharging its duties, who yet have a far greater regard to the comforts that may be found in connection with it, than for the trials, and cares, and anxieties which are almost inseparably connected with its faithful performance. To prove this, we have only to look at the small number who are actively and laboriously employed in preaching the gospel. In addition to this, how few are willing to go and forsake father, mother, brother, sister, and friends, for the sake of Christ and his cause. The great anxiety with many is, and indeed I may say that it is often a matter of calculation, where shall we be most pleasantly situated, so that we may escape the self-denials, and the many hardships incident to a discharge of ministerial duty in the outposts of our land. Our reports from the missionary committees of the Church tell a melancholy tale. But one application has been received during the past year from any clergyman among us expressive of a desire to go among the heathen and preach the gospel of peace. And the number is small, very small, of those who have been found ready to go to the destitute portions of our own country and gather the rich harvest that is fully ripe. Our Missionary Bishop has been obliged, again and again, to leave his extensive field of labour, and come and beg and entreat those who are numbered among the ministers of Christ, and unemployed, to go and hold up his hands; but alas! alas! his petitions have often been in vain, and but few have been found willing to share his toils and bear his burdens.

Now, we are persuaded better things of you, though we thus speak. We trust you will be found ready and willing to go wherever sinners are perishing for lack of the bread of life;

that no calculation of worldly comfort will be made, but that with a cheerful heart and steady mind you will give yourselves up to the work of the ministry. God grant that you may be fitted for its duties, and be made wise to win souls, and be saved from the awful, ruinous condition of the faithless minister of Jesus Christ.







